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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1741

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES IMMEDIATE

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 3531

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 1453

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0928

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0337

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEAAIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RHMFIISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE

RHMFIISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000733

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, EUR/SE, DAS KAIDANOW, INR  
DEFENSE FOR OUSD(P) DMELLEBY  
EUCOM FOR ECJ-2

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2019

TAGS: PREL PRGOV PINR TU AM AJ

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN DOWNPLAYS NAGORNO-KARABAKH LINE OF  
CONTACT INCIDENT

REF: A. BAKU 690

¶B. BAKU 697

¶C. BAKU 709

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Azerbaijani media reported a firefight 10 September at 0900 local in the Aghdam sector of the Line of Contact (LOC) with the ethnic Armenian forces of the "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" (NKR) that left five NKR troops dead and ten wounded, with one Azerbaijani soldier also wounded. Official confirmation of the details of the incident have not been forthcoming. Foreign Minister Mammadyarov discussed the issue with his Turkish colleague Davutoglu on September 11, but the call was initiated by Davutoglu. There has been little other official public comment, though the Azerbaijani press has published details. Taken by itself the incident does not appear to have the character of a provocation designed to undermine the Turkey-Armenia process, and, unless similar incidents follow appears unlikely to do so. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Little information to confirm the reports from Azerbaijani correspondents in the Aghdam region emerged in the first day or two after the incident. (Note: Aghdam region occupies a central position on the long north-south axis of the L-shaped LOC. Along with the southernmost Fizuli district it is one of the most active areas of the LOC. End Note.) The Azerbaijan MOD did not directly confirm the incident either to the Embassy or to the office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE CiO in Baku, except to correct the press report of the surname of the wounded soldier. Press reports also indicated that three of the five dead soldiers' bodies were in the "no-man's land" between the trench lines, but the ICRC in Baku could not confirm that, either.

¶3. (SBU) Azerbaijani media further reported on September 12 that the Foreign Minister had discussed the event with his Turkish counterpart when the latter called him on September ¶11. Speaking at a press conference, Davutoglu said that while Turkey was concerned by the events, these things had happened before. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry spokesman characterized the incident in identical terms.

¶4. (C) Comment. There is no evidence available to suggest that this incident is a provocation by either side (Azerbaijani or Karabakhi) to influence the Turkey-Armenia process, or that this incident by itself could do so if that were the intent. There is certainly compelling logic that suggests that Azerbaijan could seek to pressure Turkey to slow down its progress with Armenia by raising tensions on the LOC - logic that would apply equally to the NKR forces vis-a-vis Yerevan. However, evidence at hand does not support that explanation of September 10's events. Reports of ceasefire violations are a daily staple of Azerbaijani news. Aghdam district is one of the most active sectors of the LOC for this type of activity, as it is one of the few places where the opposing forces face one another over open ground. These events usually do not result in multiple casualties, but it does happen. Occasionally one side or the other will attempt to move its line forward in a particular area and take fire and casualties when they move into the open. If the reports are accurate, this may have been the scenario on September 10.

¶5. (C) Comment Continued. Such an event would be unlikely to have been provoked by Azerbaijan at this point to influence the Turkey-Armenia process. The event, despite the casualties, was still small and not very distinguishable from confrontations that take place every day on the LOC. Also, a blatant attempt to connect an event like this to the normalization talks would be inconsistent with the measured response Azerbaijan has taken to the August 31 announcement (Reftels), as putting Turkey "on the spot" would likely

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threaten to upset whatever political understanding Baku and Yerevan reached before the announcement. Finally, if Azerbaijan really intended for an incident on the LOC to generate negativity on the Turkish side toward the Armenia process, an incident in which Azerbaijan took the casualties would be more suitable. It cannot, of course, be excluded that tensions on the LOC would be exploited by one or more interested parties as the Turkey-Armenia process moves forward. However, unless this incident is followed by others, it appears unlikely that its timing was anything other than an unfortunate coincidence. End Comment.

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